



# Food in schools

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## Insights report

February 2020



# Introduction


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Eating habits play a significant role in health and wellbeing. A healthy diet during childhood can reduce the risk of health-related problems of primary concern to school-aged children, including obesity, dental caries and lack of physical activity. In addition, young people who developed healthy habits early in life are more likely to maintain them, reducing the risk of preventable chronic disease.

It is widely understood a significant number of children are arriving at school without breakfast every day, often coupled with little to no food for lunch.

Several organisations have responded to this need by creating school food programmes to ensure hundreds of New Zealand children are adequately fed every day. When it comes to school food programmes, careful design, implementation and evaluation are required to create an environment that mutually benefits schools, children and the organisation providing the food programme.

Healthy Families NZ has identified kai/food as a key area of focus for collective impact, seeing all ten sites across the motu working together to test local solutions to food insecurity and resilience.



*Can more be done to improve the current status of food programmes to ensure a structured, regular delivery mechanism, quality food and reduced food waste?*

# The co-design process

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**The framing stage** focuses on articulating the challenge, identifying the opportunities that would benefit from a closer look and innovation. Assumptions are made visible for testing and what is in and out of scope is made clear.

**The questioning stage** focuses on getting clear on the challenge and the questions we are trying to answer, what and who we already know, and what the outcomes of this project will be.

**The understanding stage** is sometimes called discovery or research and is all about understanding the challenge deeply, both from existing information sources (literature, data, etc) and from the perspective of people in the target communities.

**The designing stage** is focused on creative thinking and ideation. Using the insights from the understanding stage as springboards for generating and iterating ideas on how we might respond to the challenges.

**The refining stage** is about further developing and rapidly testing and iterating the strongest ideas, to better understand what is likely to work, building community interest and ownership as we go.



# What we've learnt

This document shares what has been learned throughout the initial stages. It draws from learnings from existing information sources, programme staff, alongside the school community.

Specifically, the process has included:

- Rapid information review of data and literature
- Key informant interviews with nearly 40 community members including; community development workers, school staff, food programme representatives and student focus groups
- A workshop with food programme representatives

**All of these activities sought to answer the following discovery questions which were developed during the questioning stage:**

- 1. What is currently happening in schools re food programmes?**
- 2. How can school food programmes work collectively/collaboratively and have a more sustainable impact on food security?**
- 3. How do food programmes fit with a schools priorities?**
- 4. How do food relief programmes fit into building local food resilience?**
- 5. What can we learn from schools who are utilising food programmes in innovative ways?**

From this wealth of information, we pulled out key themes to create conversation and serve as a launching pad for innovation.





# Insights

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Insights to understand community perspectives on lunch programmes in schools.





# 1. Waste exists. Packaging and food.

"People have a bad attitude against our free lunch like throwing it on the ground."  
- Year 5 Student

"We could be better at composting and recycling."  
- Deputy Principal

"Plastic gets everywhere."  
- Caretaker

At the very end of the food's journey, once it has passed through the hands of its recipients, school staff and students have told us stories of the waste of packaging and food.

The stories exist outdoors: in the playground, in the rubbish bins, in a caretaker's wheelbarrow and along the streets surrounding the school.

Many schools receive surplus food from local organisations such as bakeries and church groups.

Schools are being creative in how they deal with excess food such as putting baskets of food at reception or at the school gate for after-school snacks and the community to help themselves.



## 2. Co-ordinating many programmes at once puts a heavy burden on schools.

"Coordination – many schools operate several food programmes, resulting in duplication of effort."  
- A Framework for Food in Schools. Office of the Children's Commissioner (2013)

"It can take years to figure out a system that works and getting volunteers has always been a struggle."

- Vice Principal

"I don't remember getting support to set up distribution systems for the food...we had to figure it out ourselves."

- Principal

The weight of responsibility is on the school to integrate and best use these programmes.

In schools, we discovered a variety of approaches (with a variety of success) to the distribution and use of the food. Not one approach fits all and every school adapted based on their resources (time, people and environment) to make it work. Approaches included:

- Student food monitors in charge of food distribution
- Each class having their own kitchen space set up
- Community organisations running the breakfast club, manned by volunteers
- The school caretaker becomes the champion because of their involvement in many aspects of the school

Schools identified the missed opportunity to integrate programmes as a resource in curriculum and emphasized the connection to school values. Despite online resources and onboarding from programmes, schools also struggle to recruit and retain community volunteers.





### 3. Students have an appetite for being active participants in programme design. Evidence suggests this could increase impact.

"...include children, young people, families, whānau and the community and ensure that a culture of collaboration exists in the design and delivery of the programmes."

- Guidelines for School Food Programmes. Children's Commissioner (2014)

"We love going on field trips to see how the food was prepped and share lunch afterwards."

- Year 5 student

"We were never asked anything about the food programmes."

- Year 6 student

Love and concern for children and their human rights are at the centre of these programmes. Where are the opportunities for children to transform from passive recipients to active participants in the continuous improvement of food programmes?

Children love food. They love eating and share with their friends. The communal aspects of sitting down and eating food together makes children happy.

We saw students thriving in their roles as leaders because of these programmes. They are curious about how food is made. They enjoy the opportunity to be with adults without the student-teacher power dynamic.

Children are the most invested group in the success of these programmes and their views and ideas would add great value and joy to ongoing development.





## 4. Locally-led food relief transforms the value of food.

"We would rather get the ingredients and get the students to make the food fresh."

- School Receptionist

"I would love to see a centralised system like a tuck shop where all food [from the programmes] is prepared and distributed with student involvement."

- Teacher

"... a framework in which schools establish partnerships with local businesses and communities to deliver food programmes tailored to the needs and aspirations of the school community."

- Guidelines for School Food Programme  
Children's Commissioner (2017)

A programme led by the local community has greater potential to move efforts from transactional product supply to an integrated, whole-school approach with heaps of heart and cultural identity.

Locally-led initiatives have a clear line of sight beyond the provision of a service. They are staffed by people with a deep love and understanding of what works for their community. Involvement in food provision is seen as a stepping stone towards some of the root issues they know affect their whānau.

Social connection, healthy relationships, helping and constructive occupation are just some of the factors that are enhanced by locals providing a service for locals.



## 5. Te Ao Māori principles could form a valuable foundation for efforts to increase the sustainability and impact of food programmes.

"Creating a secure and caring place ... to transition between home and school with opportunities to build relationships between students and teachers outside of the classroom."

- School Breakfast for Adolescents

"Kai is more than just food for hungry children. There is a whakapapa...you're feeding more than their stomachs, you're feeding hearts and minds."

- Parent

"Breakfast club is not visibly supportive so all feel comfortable, like a community gathering."

- Associate Principal

Whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, aroha and rangatiratanga are all enhanced through the delivery of these programmes. Conversely, leading with these Te Ao Māori principles in future programme design would be transformative.

These principles make a powerful social and cultural impact and food programmes should feel proud of the difference they are making to how people connect.

We saw relationships built between children and adults that were reciprocal and respectful. We heard the pride in students' voices as they described their leadership and ability to share kai with visitors. We saw community connection and care.





## 6. Programmes deal very well with the symptoms but there appears to be a lack of coordinated focus on the root issues.

"When programmes are removed the issues are still present."

- Evaluation of Feed the Need and other Programmes (2016)

"We don't want to be relied on but we need to support families with these food programmes."

- Teacher

"I wish for whānau to have easy affordable access to healthy kai to relieve financial pressure."

- Kura Principal

There is an opportunity to work together to better understand these root issues and how we might collectively influence change.

Food insecurity, poverty, job instability and nutritional quality are root issues of hunger that systemically impact our Māori and Pasifika communities in West Auckland. These are mighty subjects to tackle.

Feeding children at school, in theory, should make an impact – a full stomach means a child is ready to learn and succeed but the evidence (nationally and internationally) remains inconclusive.

Our mutually reinforcing activities can enhance collective action – we don't have to be doing the same thing but together we can move towards eliminating food poverty.



## 7. There is not enough critical analysis of the cumulative impact of food programmes.

"...we don't want to be ungrateful...we are just so lucky to have all of this."

- Principal

"...the causal impact...is not feasible due to the wide range of initiatives providing food and an inability to source information."

- Food programme evaluation (2018)

"...establish standard measures of process, impact and outcomes across all programmes...develop shared intellectual property that can then guide policy and practice."

- Lessons from Evaluating Community Food Programmes (2017)

Stakeholders involved in running food programmes have identified a need to 'zoom out' and consider how we work together for the greatest impact.

We encountered reticence from school staff interviewees when prompted to think of opportunities for improvement. We sensed an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the service the programmes provide which can become a barrier for constructive feedback. The benefits of programmes far outweigh any challenges.

Impact evaluation can reveal powerful stories that stir hearts as well as minds – qualitative data that can be used to inform programme improvement, reduce duplication of effort, highlight areas of potential cooperation between programmes, provide good news stories to a bleak media landscape and provide a compelling business case for further funding.



# Your collective feedback

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During the collective workshop in December, a number of topics and perspectives were presented. We have synthesised this feedback for you to review below.

## **Waste exists. Packaging and food.**

- *How do we help schools calculate need – for food amounts and for waste systems?*
- *There is a cost: a need for investment for schools to manage waste*
- *Waste disposal criteria on packaging*
- *Tie in with Garden to Table if it exists at the school as well as local community gardens*
- *Duplication of certain food items from different programmes on the same day often gets wasted*

## **Co-ordinating many programmes at once puts a heavy burden on schools.**

- *Look at minimising duplication of items and processes*
- *There is an opportunity for coordination of products and supply chain*
- *Hub format – a central location for schools to get information and ideas*

## **Students have an appetite for being active participants in programme design, and the evidence suggests that this could increase impact.**

- *"Easy! Transport is always an issue."*
- *How might we include student's voice in planning?*
- *We must ensure that feedback opportunities exist for students*

## **Locally-led food relief transforms the value of food.**

- *There are food hygiene and compliance considerations*
- *Local involvement means benefits can extend beyond the school*
- *This is difficult for national programmes – if circumstances change for a community it's not a simple fix*
- *Some programmes already have local partners – i.e. produce supply and sponsors*
- *Put work into identifying community organisations and workers that could assist before the school starts the programme*
- *Community developers placed in schools/clusters for better coordination and integration*

# Your collective feedback

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**Te Ao Māori principles could form a valuable foundation for efforts to increase the sustainability and impact of food programmes.**

- *Ensure programme resources are culturally appropriate*
- *These principles in practice are your stories of impact*

**Programmes deal very well with the symptoms but there appears to be a lack of coordinated focus on the root issues.**

- *Parent involvement needed for change at home*
- *We hear heartbreaking stories – how can the home situation change?*
- *How to add more value (education and information) without being preachy or teachy?*
- *Enviroschools involvement*
- *Providing for the entire school (including teachers) improves attitudes and uptake*

**There is not enough critical analysis of the cumulative impact of food programmes.**

- *What are useful questions to ask?*
- *How do we measure impact?*
- *Whose role is this?*
- *Programmes use different models*
- *What's the purpose of measuring this and who benefits?*
- *A measure could be connection with wider community*
- *Beware of 'analysis paralysis'*



# Further insights

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**The following is information or conversation that came up during the workshop that did not necessarily fit under any of the prior insights:**

- *Programmes feel shut out from the government's universal lunch programme  
15 years of intelligence and programmes haven't been asked for input*
- *How do we support schools that don't have resources/capacity to have the programmes?*
- *Lack of breakfast culture in some homes*
- *The misnomer of 'programme' when in reality we are product suppliers.*

# How might we statements

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At the first workshop, we introduced the following "How Might We..." statements – short questions (inspired by the themes) that launch creative thinking, encouraging participants to step away from one point of view.

We will use these (and potentially change them or create more) as we go into the designing stage.

*How might we find ways to collaborate that increases our collective impact?*

*How might we create meaningful opportunities for students to play an active role in shaping the support provided to their schools?*

*How might we enhance community mana through your programmes?*

*How might we leverage our collective intelligence about the drivers creating a need for food programmes?*



# Where to from here?

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The collective indicated a willingness to come back together in February 2020 to begin the designing stage. This will entail prioritising ideas/how might we statements for ideation and prototyping over the next six months.

Healthy Families Waitākere will backbone this process using the methodology of co-design and social innovation, utilising staff time to facilitate and coordinate the collective work. Enquiries have been made with contacts at the Ministry of Education about the universal lunch programme.

# Healthy Families NZ

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A healthier Aotearoa New Zealand starts in the places where we live, learn, work and play. In healthier environments, children learn better, workplaces are more productive, people are healthier and happier, and communities thrive.

Healthy Families NZ is a Ministry of Health funded prevention initiative, operating in ten locations across Aotearoa to support change for better health and wellbeing outcomes in places where we live, learn, work and play.

Each location works to strengthen the prevention system by harnessing the power of locally-led collaboration and co-design. System innovators work alongside local leaders to identify, ideate and implement systems change to support people to make healthier choices in places where we spend our time, including; schools, workplaces, places of worship, marae, community spaces and more.

Each location has chosen its own priorities for improving health and wellbeing based on the unique needs and strengths of the community it serves.

By taking a systems approach to reducing risk factors of preventable chronic disease, the approach aims to improve health outcomes and increase health equity through key focus areas; improved nutrition, physical activity and mental health, smoke-free and reduced alcohol-related harm.

Within the Healthy Families NZ workforce is Te Kāhui Māori, a collective with an explicit focus on improving equity and health outcomes for Māori, using frameworks that sit within a Māori world view, te ao Māori.

- Te Reo Māori (Māori language)
- Tikanga Māori (protocols and customs)
- Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi)

The ten Healthy Families NZ locations work in areas with higher-than-average rates of preventable chronic diseases (such as diabetes), higher-than-average rates of risk factors for these diseases (such as smoking), and/or high levels of deprivation.





# Thank you

**With thanks to:**

The West Auckland community including school management, staff, whānau, students and champions who have made the development of these insights possible.